

Yosemite star party

Revision: May 2012

Start point: Hwy 87 - 85 interchange in San Jose.

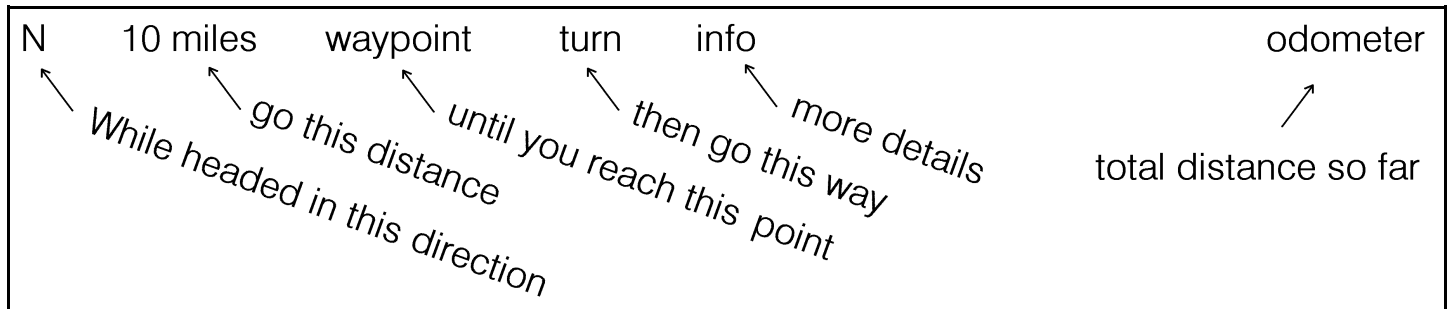
End point: Bridalveil camp area. 206 miles, 5 - 6 hours, depending on traffic.

Recommend you plan on arriving at camp by 4 PM, arrive at Glacier Point at 7 PM.

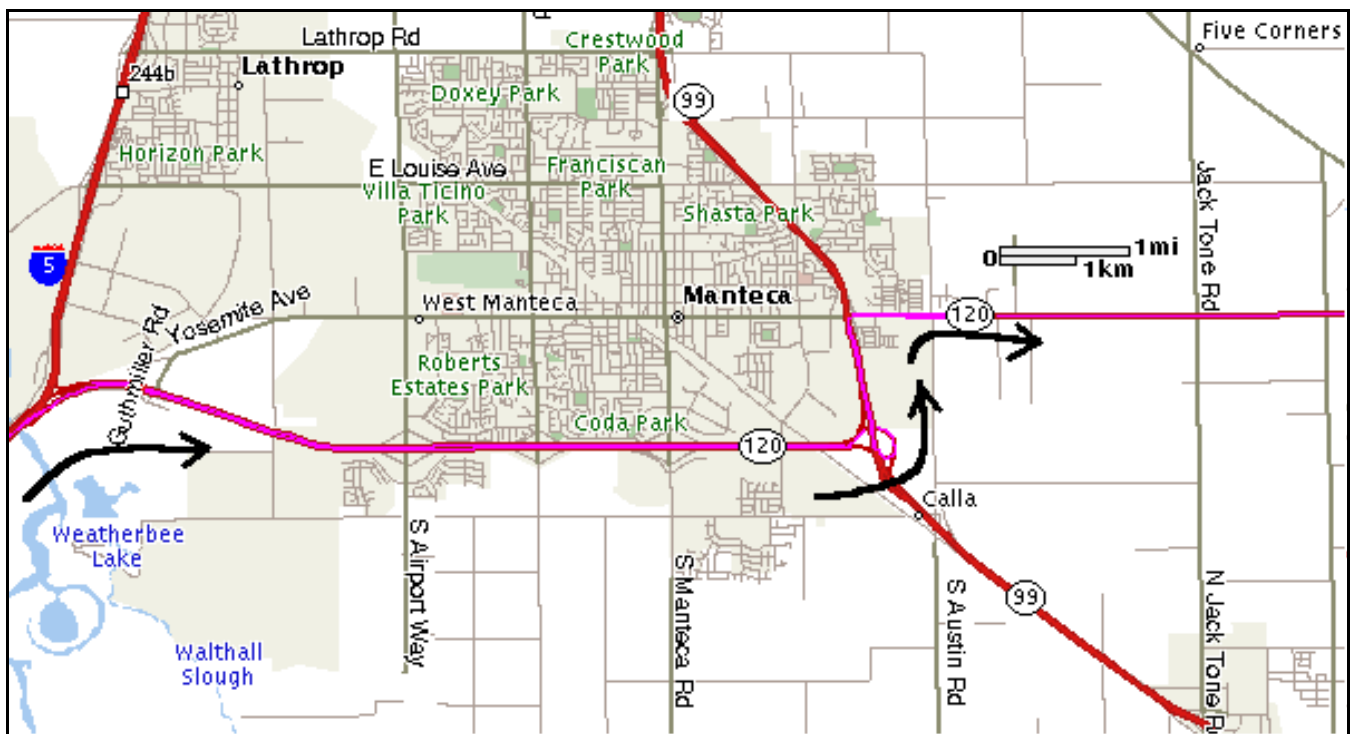
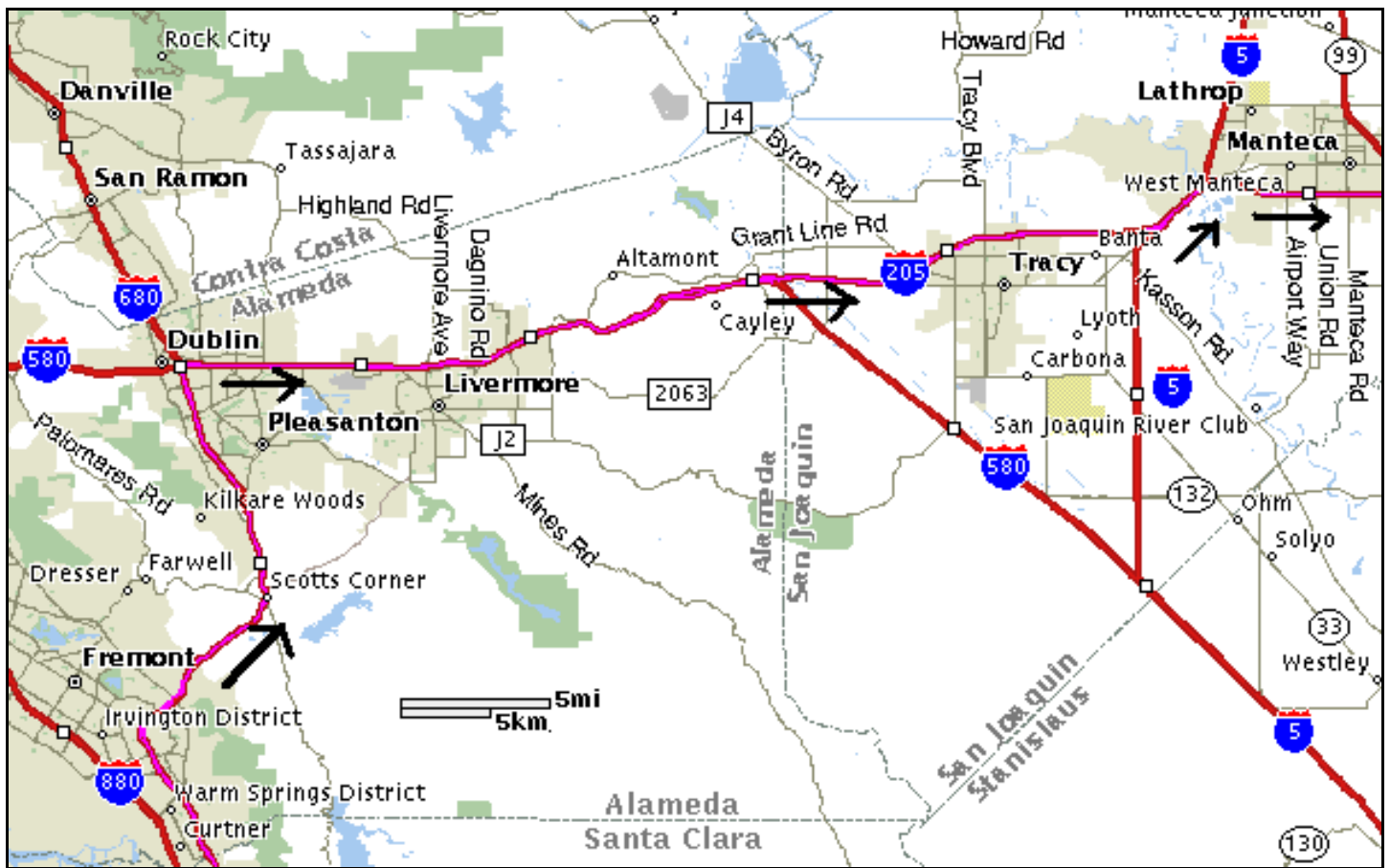
Contents:

- **Directions via Yosemite's Big Oak Flat (North) entrance** with maps and notes
- **Details on the Bridalveil campgrounds**
- **Directions and information on the star party at Glacier Point**
- **Abbreviated version of the directions** (might be easier to use while driving)
- **Notes on the reverse trip back home**

Directions format:

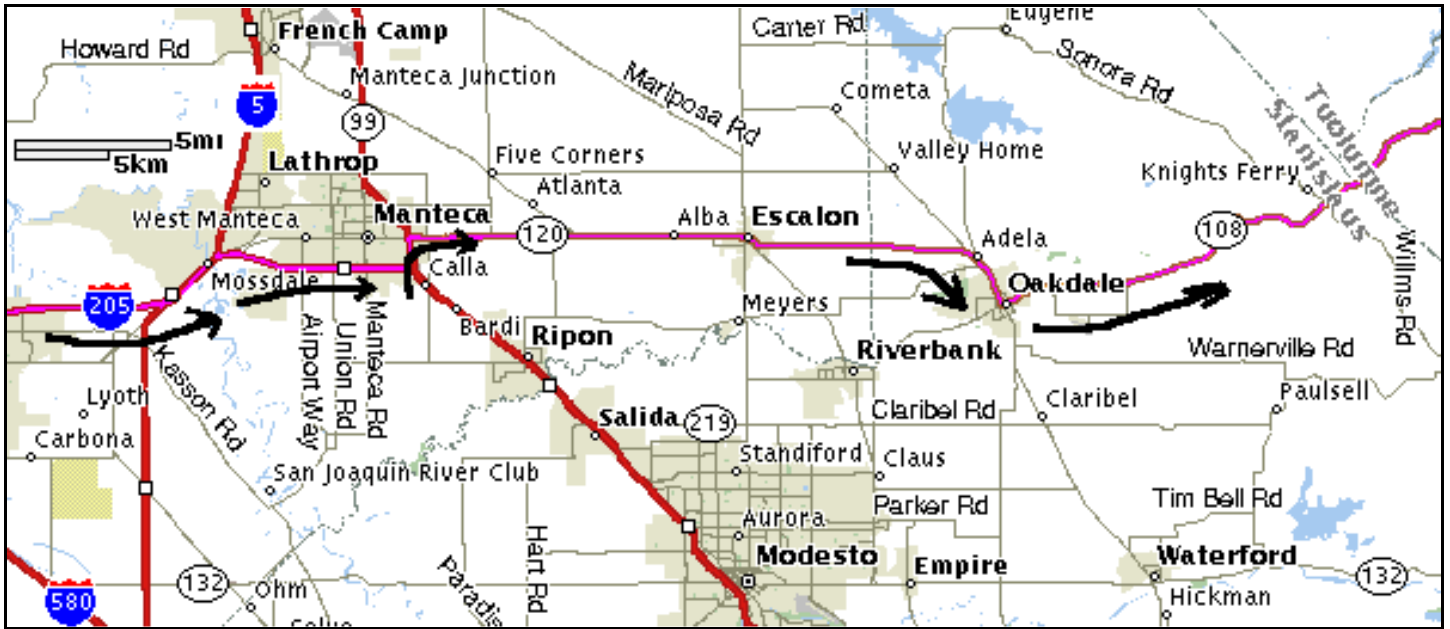


	From 85 take 87 North .	odometer: 0.0
N	5.1 miles to 680 (280) North. Exit East (right) to Pleasanton	odometer: 5.1
NE	31.7 miles to I-580 in Pleasanton. Exit East (right) to Stockton As you go over Altamont pass, you'll be entering the central valley. All those windmills are wind turbine generators, converting wind to electricity.	odometer: 36.8
E	19.7 miles to I-205. Continue North-East to Tracy/Stockton Stay Left on 580 , the left lanes become 205. Note: 205 often has heavy traffic	odometer: 56.5
E	14.4 miles to I-5. Continue North-East Stay Left on 205 , it becomes the on ramp to I-5 North	odometer: 70.9
NE	1.2 miles to CA-120. Exit East to Manteca	odometer: 72.1
E	6.4 miles to CA-120/99 Exit North (loops around to the right) This is the East/Yosemite Ave exit to Sacramento CA-120 <i>appears</i> to end at 99 with a long cloverleaf exit ramp onto 99 north.	odometer: 78.5

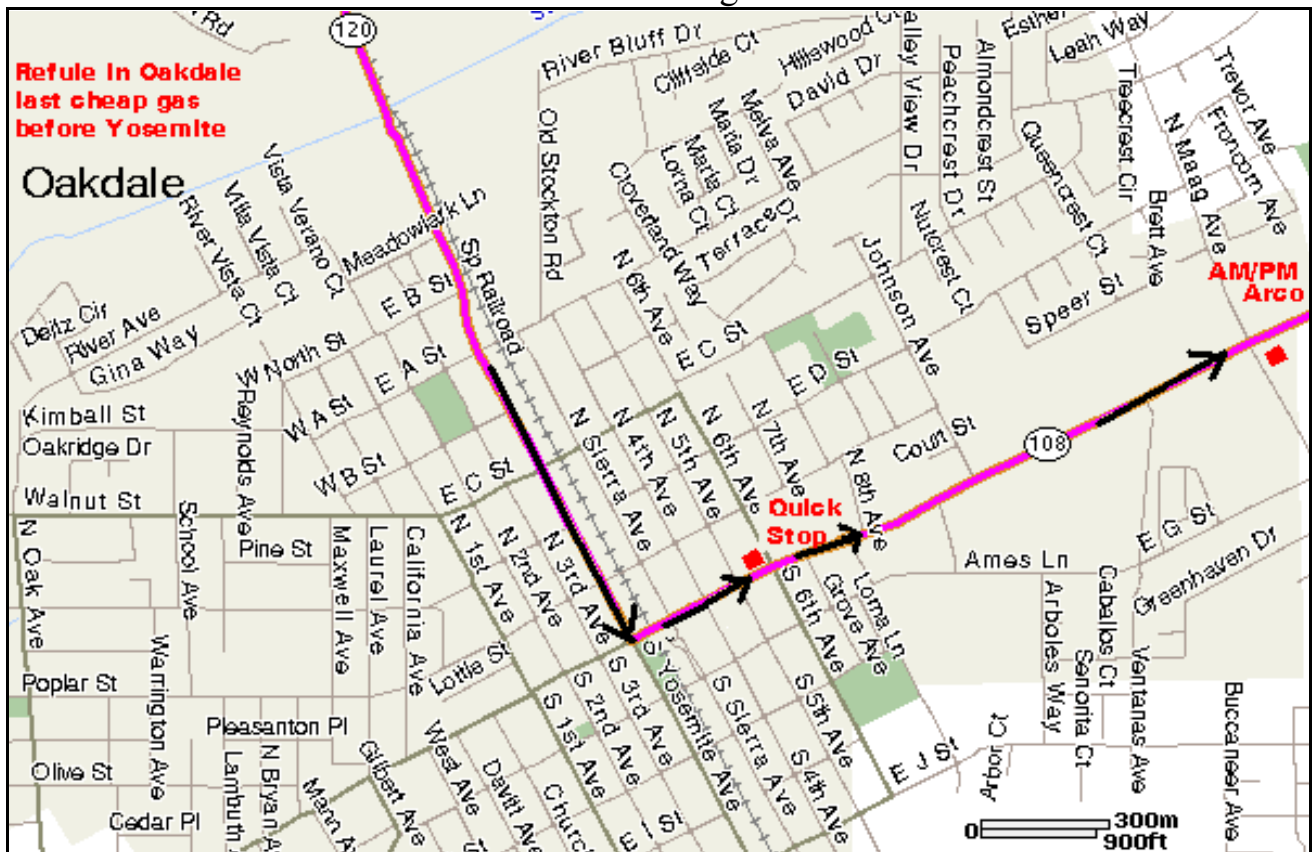


N 1.6 miles to **East Yosemite Ave / CA-120 Exit East (Right)** odometer: 80.1
 Yosemite Ave / CA-120 is a surface street.

Note: There are several fruit stands along 120/Yosemite Ave. mostly between Manteca and Escalon. Yummy summer fruit! ☺ Some are regular stores, others are simple fruit stands. The small stands have less variety, but their fruit is grown right there. Get some on the way home too!



E 20.0 miles to **CA-108 E/CA-120 E Turn North-East (Left)** odometer: 100.1
 Yosemite Ave / 120 gradually curves to the south-east as you approach Oakdale.
 120 becomes 108/120 as you turn left, (also called F Street in Oakdale).
 108/120 continues to be a surface street through town.



NOTE: Refuel in Oakdale. Gas gets more expensive as you get closer to Yosemite. Also you can get any last minute supplies in Oakdale (lunch, ice, snacks, etc.)

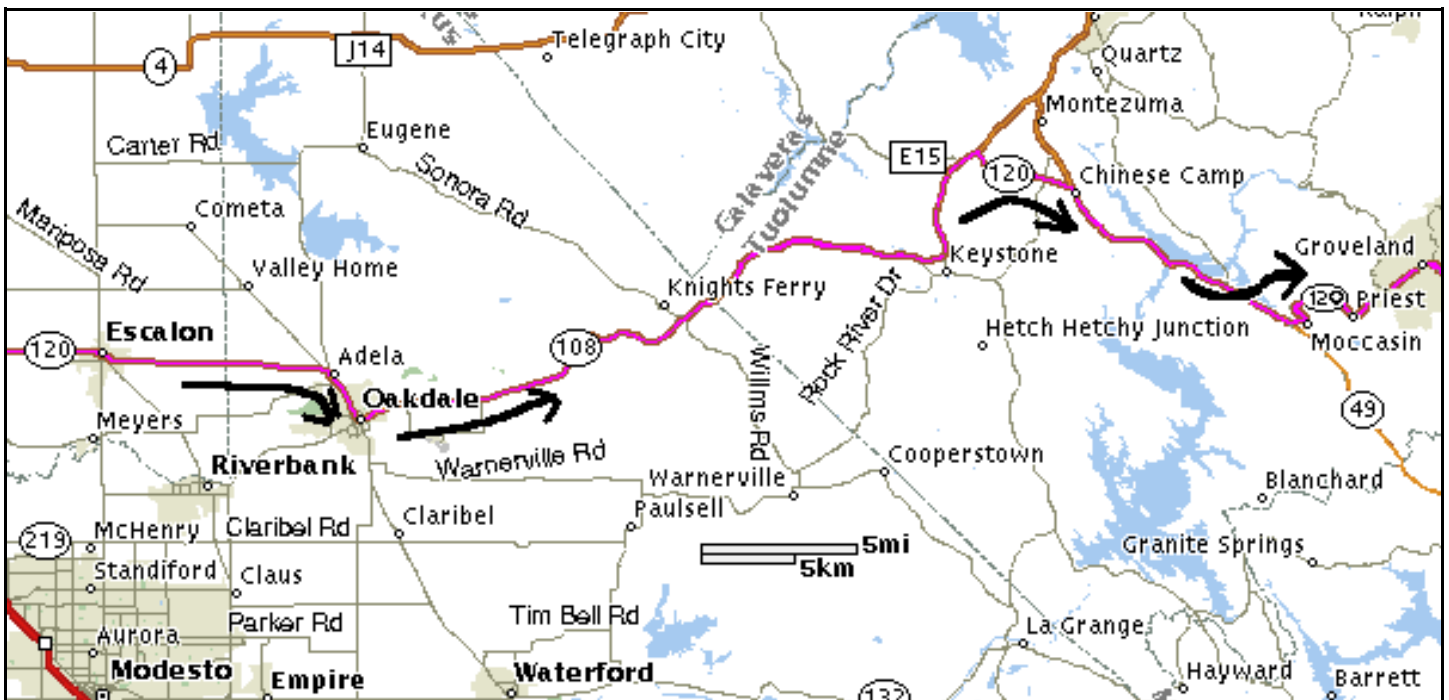
There are several gas stations in town along 108/120. Four blocks after the turn onto 108/120 is a Quick Stop on the left, (West corner of 108/120 and 6th Ave). One mile after the turn is an AM/PM Arco on the right, (East corner of 108/120 and Maag Ave.) . There are other gas stations, but at last check Arco was the cheapest.

Elapsed time: 1:30 to 2:30 hours, if no other stops and depending on traffic conditions.

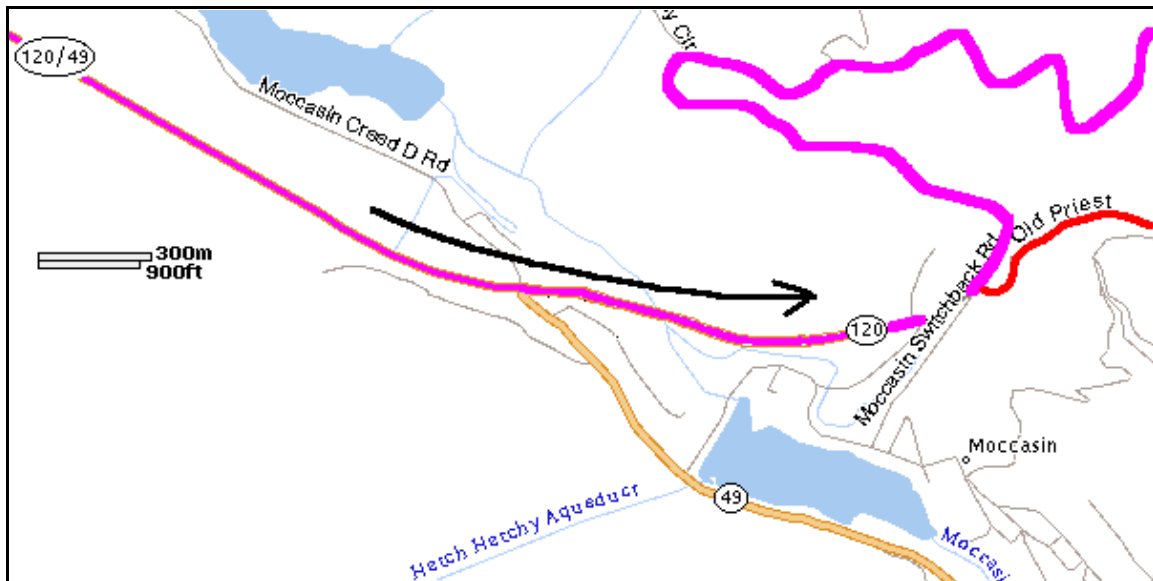
NE 24.9 miles to **CA-120 South Turn South-East (Right)** odometer: 125.0

Note: Less than ½ mile before this turn you'll see one or two small signs about travel info on station 1610 kHz AM. This is WPZQ742 the Yosemite Area Travel Network giving weather and traffic advisory information. It's only receivable within ten miles of this turn.

SE 3.5 miles to **49/120 South Continue South-East** odometer: 128.5
49 merges from the north just before reaching the tiny community of Chinese Camp.
Going South-East, it's easy to miss that this is an intersection, just keep going.



SE 8.3 miles to **120 East. Continue on 120.** odometer: 136.8
49 is an obvious right turn from 120. Just keep going on 120.



In this area you may notice a set of large pipes going down the East side of the valley and up the other (West) side. That's the aqueduct from Hetch Hetchy to San Francisco. The drop from the mountains produces enough pressure to push the water all the way to the Bay Area.

Shortcut If you're the adventurous type...

E 0.8 miles to **Old Priest Grade Rd Turn Right** odometer: 137.6

E 2.6 miles to **120 Continue on 120** odometer: 140.2

Warning: Old Priest Grade is a steep 1.8 miles that bypasses the 4.6 mile longer gentler climb on 120. It's 2.8 shorter, but unless you and your vehicle are good with steep mountain driving, it's best to stay on 120. If you take Old Priest Grade Road and your vehicle overheats, there's a turnout roughly half way up on the right. On the way home, your brakes really need to be in good shape, otherwise stay off Old Priest Grade.

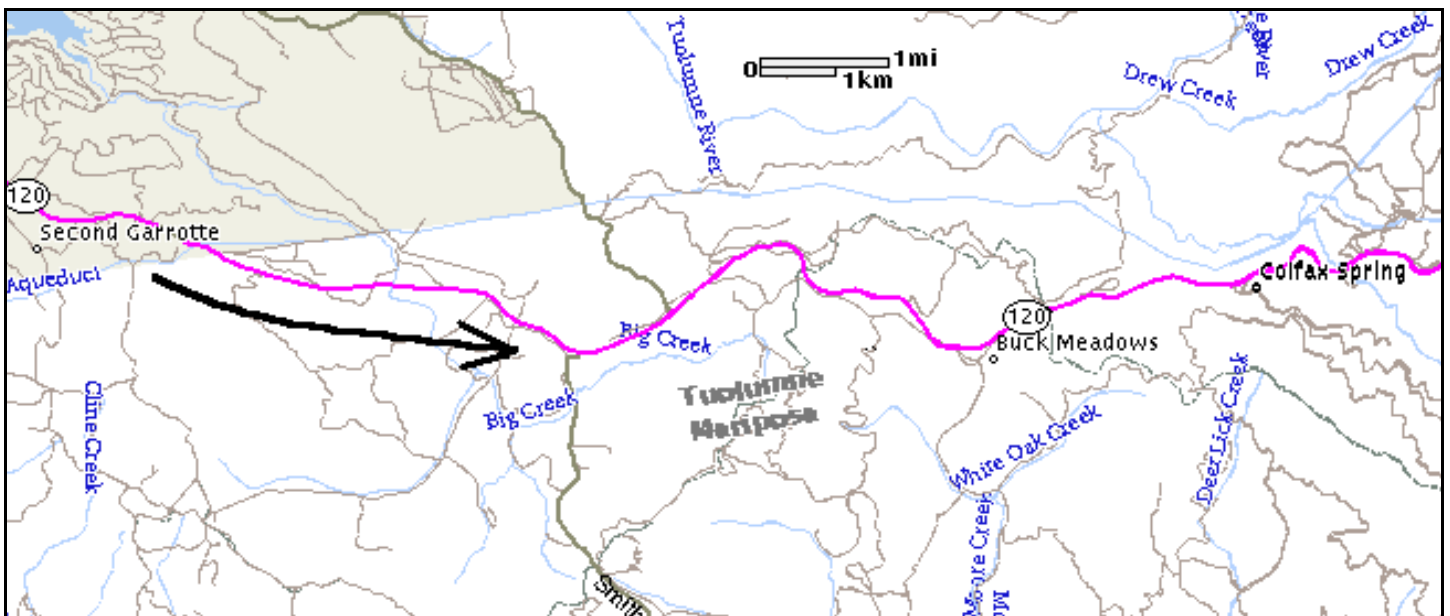
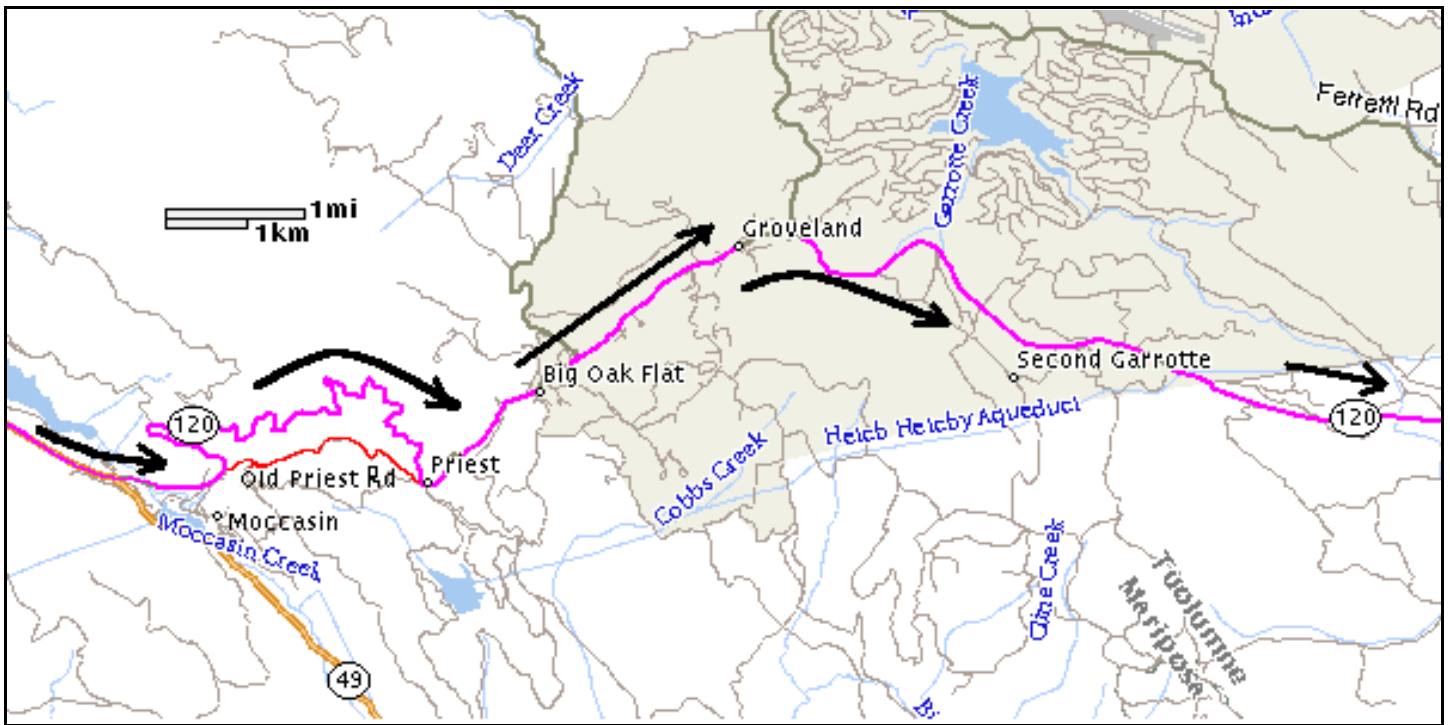
The odometer readings from here on assume you did NOT take the shortcut.

Heat note: 120 climbs the mountain fairly steeply for about five miles. Watch the engine temperature! **Turn off the air conditioning** during that climb.

E 7.9 miles to Groveland. **Continue** odometer: 144.7

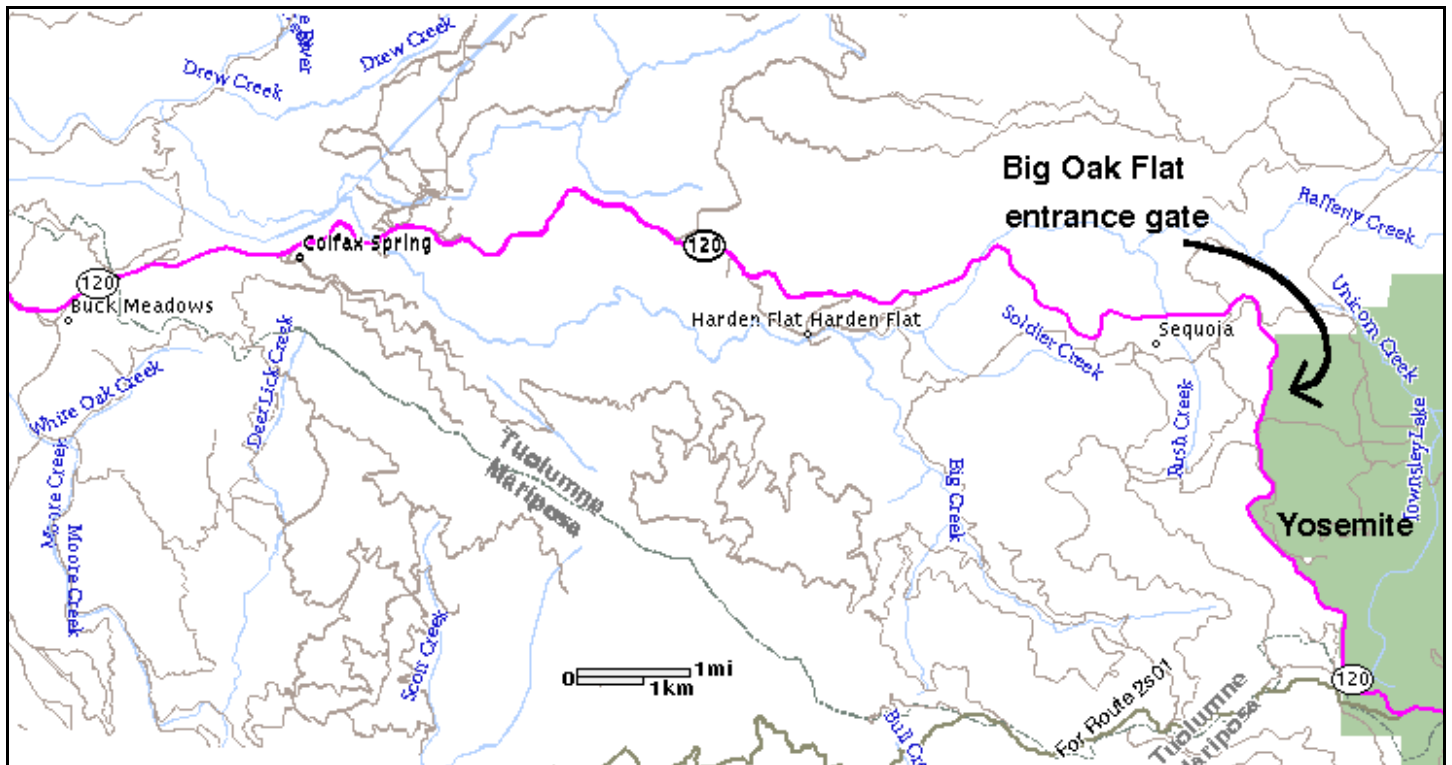
Note: 120 is a surface street through the middle of Groveland—slow down through town.

Groveland is a small town from the old wild west and gold rush days. Just from 120, you can see almost all there is to see of Groveland. It's the last town of significance before reaching Yosemite, although there are a couple of tiny "wide-spot-in-the-road" communities farther along.



Note: Near the tiny community of Buck Meadows is another sign about the travel info station 1610 kHz AM. This time it's station WPZQ733. This station is only receivable within about ten miles of Buck Meadows.
odometer: 155.0

Note: "Rim of the World" vista point on the left, near Colfax Spring. This valley is formed by the Tuolumne River. It's worth stopping for a look. On the way home, it's 11.9 miles past the Yosemite gate. (As of 2011, some of the view is starting to get blocked by trees.)
odometer: 157.0



E 23.5 miles to Yosemite Park boundary. **Continue** odometer: 168.2

S 0.7 miles to Yosemite Park Big Oak Flat **Entrance Gate** odometer: 168.9
Stop, show pass. You'll need to show your pass when leaving too. Without the pass you'll have to pay the park entrance fee. Tell the gate ranger you are a volunteer astronomer—part of the naturalist program at Glacier Point for that weekend.

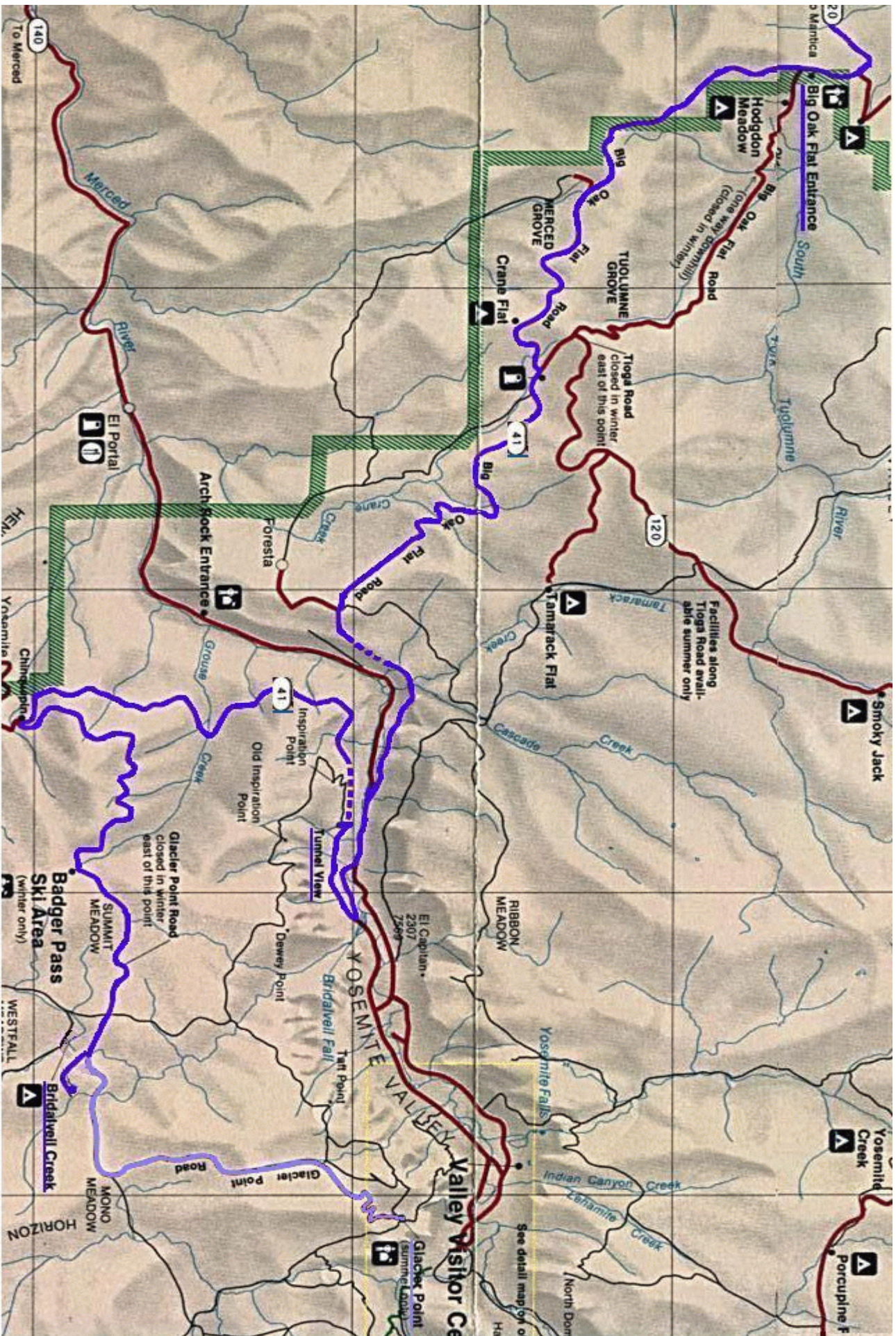
There are restrooms and an info center just to the right after you go through the gate. Park maps are available at the info center or the gate ranger may have some. From here, 120 is also called Big Oak Flat Road.

Elapsed time to the gate: 3:30 to 4:30 hours depending on traffic conditions and assuming only one brief stop to refuel.

Continue South on 120 / Big Oak Flat Road. (See Yosemite detail map next page)

SE 7.7 miles to **41 / Big Oak Flat Road** **Continue** odometer: 176.6
 Big Oak Flat Road becomes Hwy 41 and continues into Yosemite Valley.
 120 turns left (East) and becomes Tioga Road. Don't turn, keep going on 41.

SE 9.5 miles to **41/140**. Stop sign. **Turn Left (South-East) on 41** odometer: 186.1
 Left is 41 to the Yosemite Valley floor.
 Right is 140 to Merced and Yosemite's Arch Rock (west) entrance gate.



170 miles from South West San Jose to Big Oak Flat entrance. 3.30 hours if no traffic. Plan on 4 hours or more. (Includes refueling stop in Oakdale.)
 About 1 hour from Big Oak Flat entrance to Bridalveil camp. (Includes 10 min. stop at Tunnel View.)
 Follow the route marked in blue from the Big Oak Flat gate to the Bridalveil camp. Glacier Point is 8 miles further up the road.

- SE 0.9 miles to valley floor. **Stay Right. Continue on 41** odometer: 187.0
The road becomes one-way as you turn right, and you'll cross over a small bridge.
- E 0.9 miles pass Bridalveil falls. **Stay Right. Continue on 41** odometer: 187.9
The road becomes two-way again.
Go past the Bridalveil Falls parking area on the left.
You'll now be heading up the other side of the valley.
- W 1.6 miles to **"Tunnel View"** lookout. **Turn Right** into parking lot. odometer: 189.5

Stop for a few minutes at the "Tunnel View" area just before entering a long tunnel.
Yes, you **have** to stop! ☺ This is **THE** classic view of Yosemite Valley.
If you turned around and went home after this, it would still be worth the trip.
- W 0.01 miles **Continue** into the tunnel odometer: 189.5
- S 7.6 miles to **Glacier Point Road. Turn Left (East)** odometer: 197.1
- E 7.8 miles to **Bridalveil Camp area. Turn Right (South)** odometer: 204.9
0.35 miles after the turn there's a speed bump then the road veers left.
Go slow. These roads in the camp area are narrow, basically just paved dirt,
and people may be walking anywhere.
- S 0.6 miles to **Loop C, camp spots 81, 83, 85, 94, and 95.** odometer: 205.5
We'll be in the group camp area on your left as you go around the curve at the far end.

Bridalveil Camp Area can be confusing the first time there—see details next 3 pages.

Elapsed time: 5 to 6 hours, depending on traffic conditions and assuming one brief refueling stop and 10 minutes at the Tunnel View lookout.

Find a camp spot. Set up camp. Have a good dinner. Relax for a bit.

Plan on leaving for Glacier Point around 6 to 6:30 PM, (see Star Party page below).

NOTE: ALL food MUST go in the steel bear boxes when not in use. That includes anything that even remotely smells like food, such as toothpaste. Don't put any of that stuff in your tent or car. If the bears smell food on something, they'll take it. Locked car doors won't stop an adult bear. If you had food next to your sleeping bag, a bear may smell that and take the bag. (Yes, that has happened.) Fortunately, the bears don't care about you, only your food. The bear boxes will accept a padlock, if you feel you need it.

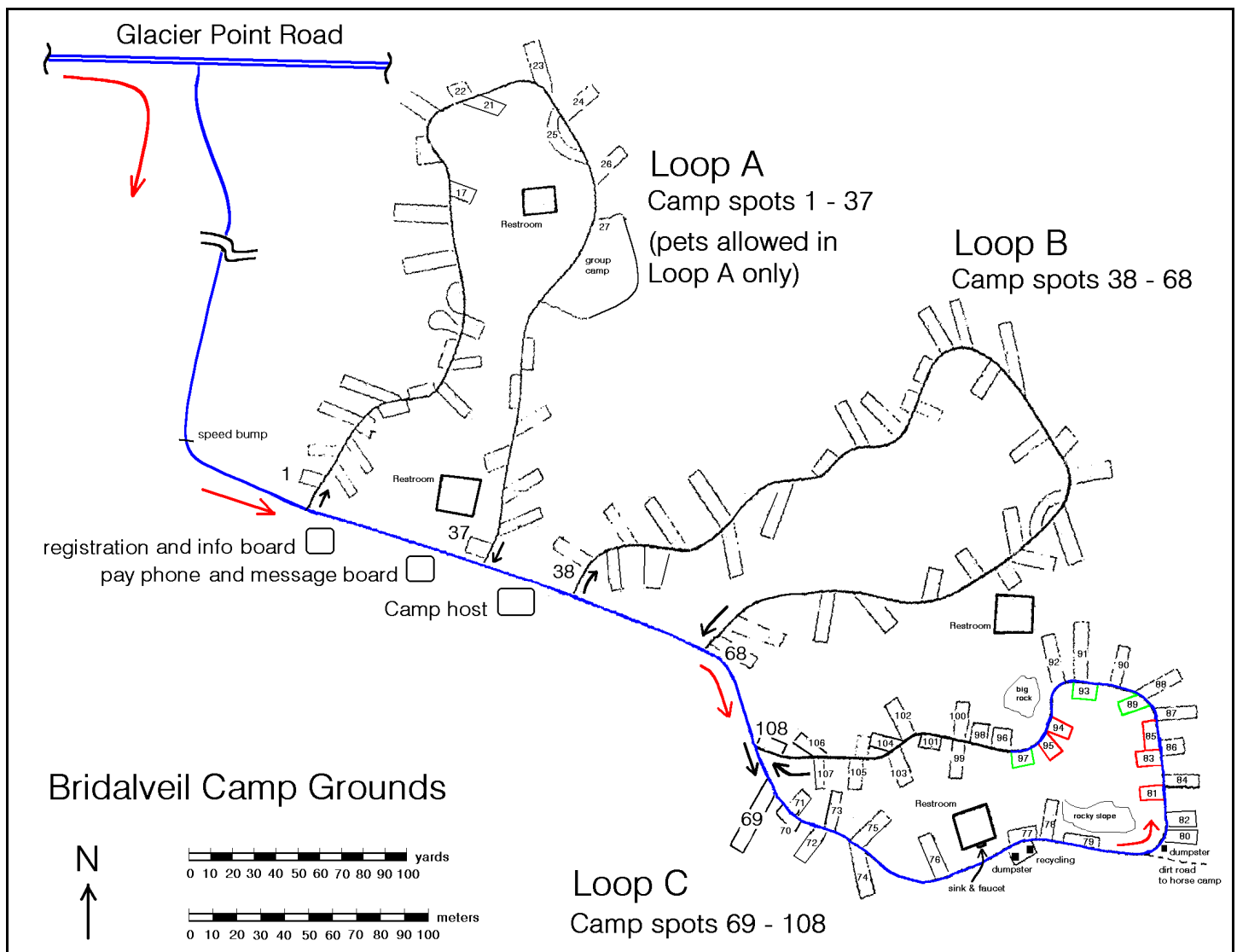
Bridalveil Camp Area

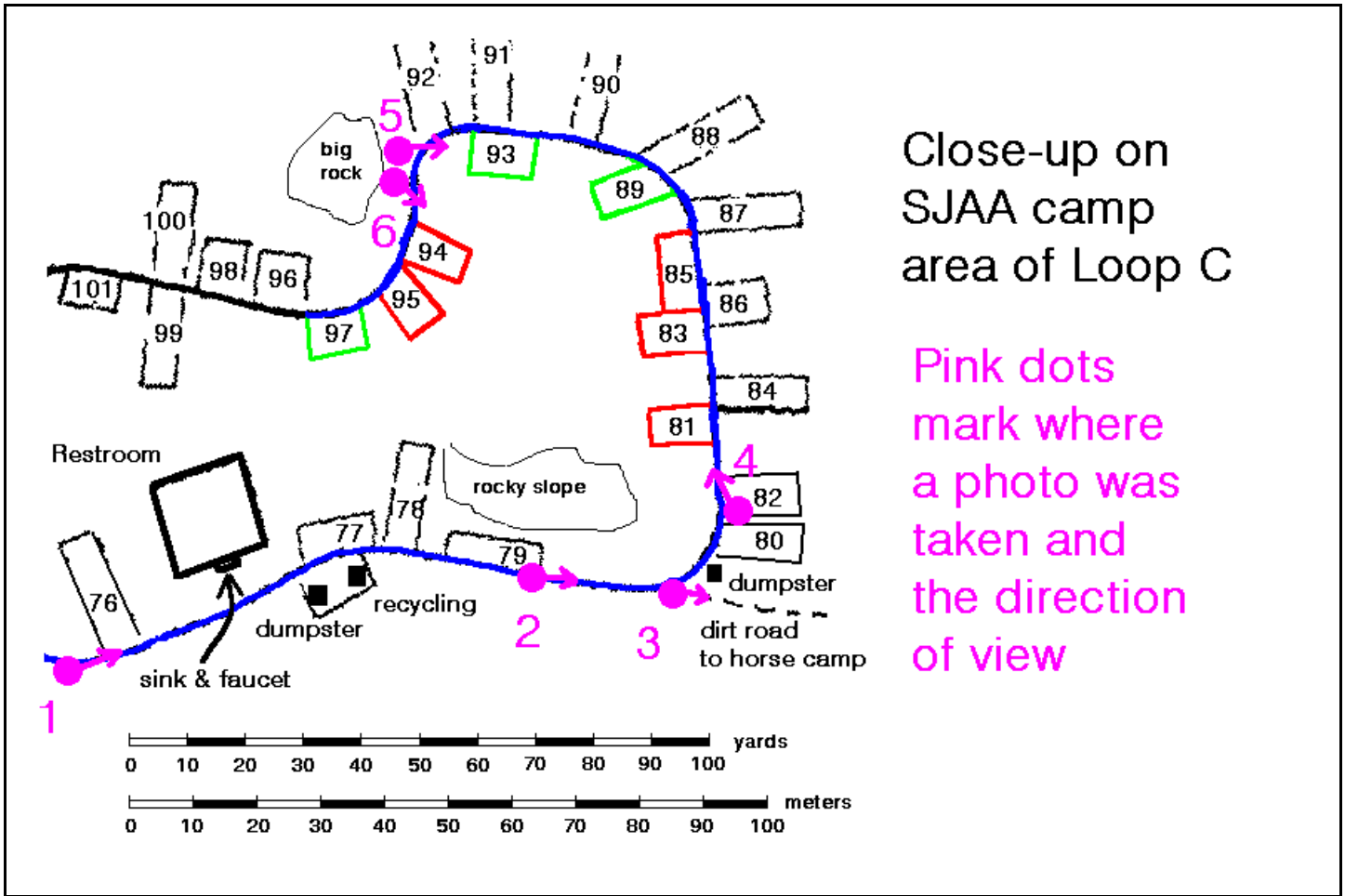
There are three one-way “Loop” roads, we’ll be in the last one—Loop C. Each enters from and exits onto the main road, if you can call it a “main” road. (path marked in blue on the map.)

Keep to the right until you reach the far end where the paved road veers sharply left (North) and a dirt road continues on. **Follow the paved road—turn left.** There should be a brown dumpster nearby. See the Loop C detail map next page and the photos.

After Loop C makes that left turn, it circles to the left around the group camp area (about 1/3 the size of a football field). That’s our area. Each spot has a small sign with the camp spot number and reservation tag—look for the tags marked “volunteer” or “SJAA” or “astronomer.” **Our camp spot numbers are 81, 83, 85, 94, and 95,** (marked in red on the map below).

There are three other spots in this group camp area, 89, 93, and 97 (marked in green on the map below). Those are not reserved for us. If there are many of us, we may have to really squeeze in. In that case we will try to get those last two or three spots as well (if they’re available).





1 That small building on the left (past the edge of the camper) is a restroom. Loop C veers left about 100 yards farther—make that turn.

2
That brown box is a bear-proof dumpster. Be aware they could plop it down before or after the turn. Note that small sign (right of center)...



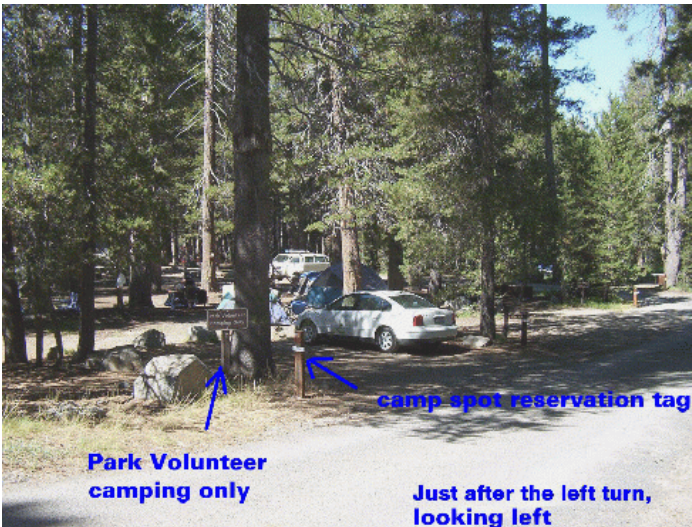
3

Here's a close-up on that small sign. If you're headed up this dirt road, you just missed the left turn! (In this view, that dumpster is out of the frame just to the left.)



4 That sign identifies this as the volunteer group camping area.

Also note all the tiny signs on two-foot-high posts, one at each camp spot. That's where you'll find the camp spot numbers and reservation tags.



5

There's Jim Van Nuland's white van, it's parked at camp spot 93. You can also see it in the background of photo 4. That gives you an idea as to the size of the group camp area.



6 And that's pretty much what the camp area looks like. (There's the front of Jim's van again on the left edge.)

Note the brown boxes, those are bear-boxes. Each has double doors along one side with a latch that you can figure out, but bears can't. Anything food-like **must** be stored in those. Mind those rocks and trees when parking.



Star Party at the Glacier Point amphitheater

Plan on arriving to set up scopes around 7 PM (sunset). One or two may arrive early for solar viewing, but the rest should not arrive early.

From the Bridalveil camp area, head back out to Glacier Point Road. odometer: 0.0

N 0.6 miles to **Glacier Point Road. Right (East).** odometer: 0.6

NE 7.8 miles to **Glacier Point parking lot. Right (East) dirt driveway** odometer: 8.4
Glacier Point Road ends at Glacier Point parking lot, you can't miss it. Immediately look for a dirt driveway on the right—it's the first and only possible right. Enter the dirt driveway—**go very slow**, don't stir up dust. Watch for pedestrians and hikers.

E 100 yards to **Glacier Point amphitheater (telescope area)** odometer: 8.4
Go straight in to the end. There is a way to turn left before you reach the end—that's the way back out, don't turn left there. Just before the amphitheater, the dirt driveway loops around to the left. There's only room for a few vehicles, pull as far forward as you can (without heading back out) to make room for others.
Elapsed time from camp: 24 minutes.

We may NOT leave our vehicles at the amphitheater. Pick a spot in the amphitheater, unload your equipment, then drive back out and park in the parking lot. The parking lot loops around counter-clockwise one-way and comes back out near where you first entered. (Those last few parking spaces are extra long for busses.)

Please do not bring food to the star party itself. The bears can smell food better than most dogs—and they WILL get it. There are bear boxes at the far west end of the parking lot—any food **must** be kept in those.

Electricity (outdoor outlets) is available at several spots in the amphitheater.

Restrooms (pit toilets) are available in three places around the parking lot. **Note:** the one farthest away from the amphitheater (at the far West end of the parking lot) tends to be the least used and therefore the cleanest. Trust me on that, especially if it's a busy weekend.

The public star party ends between 11 PM and midnight, then it's a dark-sky star party for us only—please behave accordingly. If you don't plan to stay after the public phase of the star party, the "leaving window" is 12 midnight.

When leaving **PLEASE BE COURTEOUS!** **Keep the lights to a minimum. Come prepared with duct tape or something to cover lights that you can't turn off. This includes daytime running lights, dome lights, side door lights, trunk lights, etc.**

Abbreviated version for use while driving

(suggest printing these two pages on one sheet, double sided.)

Start point: Freeway 85 - 87 interchange in San Jose	
From 85 take 87 North .	0.0
N 5.1 miles to 680 (280) North . Exit East (Right) to Pleasanton	5.1
NE 31.7 miles to I-580 in Pleasanton. Exit East (Right) to Stockton	36.8
E 19.7 miles to I-205 . Continue North-East to Tracy/Stockton Stay Left on 580 , the left lanes become I-205.	56.5
E 14.4 miles to I-5 . Continue North-East Stay Left on 205 , it becomes the on ramp to I-5 North	70.9
NE 1.2 miles to CA-120 . Exit East (Right) to Manteca	72.1
E 6.4 miles to CA-120/99 Exit North (loops around to the right) East/Yosemite Ave exit to Sacramento, long cloverleaf exit ramp.	78.5
N 1.6 miles to East Yosemite Ave / CA-120 Exit East (Right) East Yosemite Ave/CA-120 is a surface street	80.1
E 20.0 miles to CA-108 E/CA-120 E Turn Left (North-East) Refuel in Oakdale , then continue North-East on 108/120	100.1
NE 24.9 miles to CA-120 South Turn Right (South-East)	125.0
SE 3.5 miles to 49/120 South Continue South-East	128.5
SE 8.3 miles to 120 East . Continue on 120 . Heat note: This 5 mile climb is rather steep, turn off the air conditioning during that climb. Shortcut:	136.8

from where 120 splits off from 49:

E 0.8 miles to **Old Priest Grade Rd Turn Right** 137.6

E 2.6 miles to **120 Continue on 120** 140.2

Warning: Old Priest Grade is very steep, but it's 1.8 miles instead of the 4.6 mile longer gentler climb on 120, (2.8 miles shorter).

E 7.9 miles to Groveland. **Continue on 120** 144.7
Last significant town before Yosemite.

E 24.2 miles to Yosemite Park Big Oak Flat **Entrance Gate** 168.9
Have your entrance pass ready.

SE 7.7 miles to **41 / Big Oak Flat Road Continue** 176.6

SE 9.5 miles to **41/140**. Stop sign. **Turn Left (South-East) on 41.** 186.1

SE 0.9 miles to valley floor. **Stay Right. Continue on 41** 187.0
Road becomes one-way.

E 0.9 miles **Stay Right. Continue on 41** 187.9
Road becomes two-way again.
Pass Bridalveil Falls parking lot on the left.

W 1.6 miles to **Tunnel View lookout**. Check it out! 189.5

W 0.01 miles **Continue West** into the tunnel 189.5

S 7.6 miles to **Glacier Point Road. Turn Left (East)** 197.1

E 7.8 miles to **Bridalveil Camp area. Turn Right (South)** 204.9
Glacier Point is about 8 miles farther ahead.

E 0.6 miles to **camp spot in Loop C.** (see Bridalveil detail map) 205.5
After 0.35 miles in, the road veers left (East), the camp area begins here—slow down.

On the return trip home, obviously you'll reverse the directions. A few things of note...

It takes over an hour to reach the Big Oak Flat Entrance gate from the Bridalveil campgrounds.

Upon reaching the valley floor, you'll have to drive part way around the valley. **Stay to the left, follow the signs to 41/120/Tioga/Merced.** It's not a bad drive, you might want to pull off and do a little sight seeing before leaving.

Shortly after you head back up the other side of the valley on 120/41, 41 splits off to the right, 140 to the left. **Stay right, take 41/120/Tioga to Manteca.** (140 will take you to the Arch Rock West entrance then on to Mariposa and Merced. It's possible to return home via 140, but that's a different route.)

Farther along you'll see a right turn to Tioga Road / 120 East to Tuolumne Meadows. Don't turn there, **keep going straight on 41/120 to San Francisco.**

You will need to **show your pass at the gate on the way out.** Remember there are restrooms at the facilities just to the left as you approach the gate, (might be a good idea).

Just over 3 miles past Groveland, you'll have a chance to go down the short cut—Old Priest Grade Road. It's a left turn off of 120 immediately after a tiny roadside café. **If you have ANY doubts about your brakes, stay on 120.** Old Priest is rather steep, use low gears.

Shortly after getting down from the mountains, 49 comes in from the south and joins with 120. Both 49 and 120 are combined for a while. That body of water is the east part of Don Pedro Res. Just after Chinese Camp (population 150), watch for the left turn to Oakdale / Manteca. This is where 120 splits off to the East (left) and 49 continues North. **Turn left on 120.**

3.4 miles farther, you'll **make a left turn at the stop sign to continue on CA-108/CA-120.** On the way to Yosemite, this was an easy right turn. Going back the other way can be a little tricky—cars coming from the right on 108 tend to go fast. Be alert.

Oakdale is a good place to refuel. Stay in the right lane for the right turn onto 120 to Manteca.

Remember the fruit stands, (mostly between Escalon and Manteca). Take home some fresh fruit! 😊

As you reach Manteca, stay in the left lane to enter 99/120 south-bound. Once on the freeway stay in the right lane—120 splits off to the right, then merges onto I-5 south. Generally, follow the signs to San Francisco. A bit farther, 205 splits off to the right. 205 then merges onto 580, which takes you to Livermore and Pleasanton. On 580 in Pleasanton, the exit ramp to 680 South comes up on the right. And 680 takes you back to San Jose. Welcome home. 😊